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Joint intelligence plan wins backers

By Bill Gertz
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The controversy over intelligence oversight has sparked renewed interest in a proposal by Rep. Henry J. Hyde, Illinois Republican, to establish a joint Senate-House intelligence oversight committee.

In the last two weeks, 31 new sponsors joined Mr. Hyde in pushing a bill to merge the House and Senate intelligence oversight committees, according to Michael Eaton, a Hyde aide.

This month Sen. David F. Durenberger, Minnesota Republican, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and Sen. Patrick Leahy, Vermont Democrat who is vice chairman, told reporters that the Senate committee was not satisfied with the work of the Central Intelligence Agency and that the agency had sought looser congressional control.

Those remarks drew a sharply worded letter of protest from CIA Director William J. Casey, who charged the committee with conducting "off the cuff" oversight and with compromising sensitive intelligence sources and methods.

Mr. Hyde, who joined the House intelligence committee this year, said in an interview that the recent criticism of the intelligence community by Senate members "doesn't belong in the press."

"I think [criticism] belongs in the committee," Mr. Hyde said.

A recent letter from Mr. Hyde to House members said that damaging intelligence leaks have led to reduced cooperation from allied intelligence services. The letter said a joint committee would be more efficient and reduce leaks of classified information.

Recent intelligence failures include a leak of a top secret covert program against Libyan strongman Col. Muammar Qaddafi, the defection of senior Soviet KGB official Vitaly Yurchenko, and the arrest last week of a Chinese communist agent who worked for the CIA for three decades.

On the issue of whether U.S. intelligence agencies have been produc-

ing results equal to the taxpayers' investment, Mr. Hyde voiced reserved criticism.

"I am not satisfied that the best possible job is being done," he said. But he said that the agencies may be performing at a level equal to the budget and personnel restraints imposed by Congress.

"I don't think one can be entirely happy with the state of affairs vis-a-vis the intelligence agencies and Congress," Mr. Hyde said.

He said Congress is as much to blame for any intelligence shortcomings because of congressional restraints placed on intelligence activities and resources since the mid-1970s.

He says a joint congressional intelligence committee would streamline the oversight process and could lead to fewer damaging leaks of secret intelligence information.

Last week the number of co-sponsors for Mr. Hyde's proposal for a joint intelligence committee grew from 48 to 79. House Republican leader Robert H. Michel of Illinois is a recent co-sponsor.

The 13 Democrats behind the bill include New York's Samuel S. Stratton and Robert Mrazek, Marvin Leath of Texas, Bill Nichols of Alabama and William J. Hughes of New Jersey.

The ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, William S. Broomfield of Michigan, is also a co-sponsor.

"I don't maintain that if we have a joint committee, that's going to dry up leaks because there are so many sources for the leaks," Mr. Hyde said. "But it's obvious that the fewer people in the loop, the less people there are to leak or have a motive to leak."

Mr. Hyde would not comment on the Yurchenko case and said he felt that too much had been said by his Senate counterparts on the intelligence committee.

"I think we've been more responsible on that," Mr. Hyde said. "I think that to do our jobs we shouldn't have our names in the paper."

Mr. Hyde in January introduced a bill setting up a joint intelligence committee with nine senators and nine representatives—five from the majority party and four each from the minority party in each house.

The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence has 16 members and about 20 committee staff members, and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has 15 members and about 45 committee staff, Mr. Hyde said.

All intelligence agencies are required to report to both committees on a wide variety of topics, he said.

The joint committee proposed by Mr. Hyde would appropriate funds and oversee activities of the U.S. intelligence community, including the CIA, FBI, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and the State Department's intelligence section.

When 100 co-sponsors support the bill, "then I'm going to start pounding the drums," Mr. Hyde said. He hopes that hearings on the subject can be held by next year.

House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, who does not trust the administration on intelligence matters, is expected to oppose the proposal, Mr. Hyde said. Mr. Durenberger also opposes it, he said, but Mr. Casey and former CIA directors James Schlesinger and Richard Helms have expressed their approval.